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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 000776

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BAITULLAH MEHSUD DECLARES WAR

REF: LAHORE 67

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On April 5, Baitullah Mehsud announced that in retaliation for drone strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and a now five million dollar U.S. bounty on his head, his Taliban would be carrying out two attacks each week in Pakistan. This announcement came after several days of brazen attacks across Pakistan, including suicide bombings against the Frontier Constabulary in Islamabad and a Shia mosque in Chakwal. Prime Minister Gilani called a special law and order meeting and a follow-up cabinet meeting to develop a new counter-terrorism policy. Mehsud's goal clearly is to undermine public confidence in the government by attacking security forces and fomenting sectarian strife. Mehsud's move into the settled areas is bringing terrorism to the doorstep of average citizens, including in Lahore and Islamabad. However, without clear government leadership most people are scared and unsure of how to proceed. Many Pakistanis blame the GOP's cooperation with the U.S. for this increase in terrorist attacks. Until the GOP can articulate a clear strategy to contain Baitullah Mehsud, most Pakistanis will not be swayed to the government's side. End summary.

MEHSUD'S WAR

¶2. (C) Within 24 hours, between April 4 and 5, several suicide bombs shook various cities in Pakistan including Islamabad, a growing sign that Pakistan's Taliban are overwhelming the GOP's security forces. In a telephone interview with press on April 5, Hakimullah Mehsud, a powerful deputy to Baitullah Mehsud, claimed Taliban responsibility for the suicide attacks. The spokesman said the bombings were in retaliation for an alleged drone attack in Orakzai agency on April 1. Hakimullah announced the Pakistani Taliban planned to carry out two attacks each week within Pakistan in what he called "revenge" against Pakistan for the missile strikes. Already on March 31, Baitullah Mehsud claimed responsibility for the attack on the Lahore police training center (see reftel). On April 4 Mehsud reportedly claimed responsibility for a shooting incident in New York in which 13 people were killed, though there is no evidence that the New York incident was linked to Mehsud, most of the other attacks were likely carried out by the Pakistani Taliban. In the claims for responsibility, Mehsud has threatened escalation of attacks against U.S. and GOP targets in retaliation for U.S. drone strikes and the public announcement of a USG bounty for information on his whereabouts.

¶3. (S) Baitullah Mehsud is the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the overarching umbrella organization that loosely affiliates most Pakistani Taliban. Mehsud controls much of South Waziristan agency and reportedly commands a force of 40,000 to 50,000 fighters. Additionally, his reach extends over most of the related Taliban militants in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). With fighters spreading across the country, his power is increasing and the TTP is claiming responsibility for more attacks. The recent drone attacks targeting Baitullah probably have spurred the Taliban into more brazen action and demonstrate how little control the GOP has over Baitullah and the TTP. Mehsud linking the attacks in Pakistan to the U.S. drone attacks is also an attempt to pressure the GOP into stopping the U.S. strikes. Mehsud's Taliban are actively involved in a media campaign, reaching out to the press regularly. With somewhat autonomous Taliban deputies, such as Qari Hussain who is believed to lead Fidayeen-e-Islam, Mehsud does not have to personally direct each attack to spread his terror across the country.

ATTACK IN ISLAMABAD

¶4. (SBU) On April 4 a suicide bomber attacked a Frontier Constabulary check-post in Sector F 7/3 in Islamabad. The second such bombing in Islamabad in two weeks killed eight FC personnel and one civilian, and also injured 12 others. The blast took place at 1935 in the evening along the main Margalla road near upper class diplomatic neighborhoods. The

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blast was followed by the Pakistani security officials firing in the air in response to the attack. The Deputy Inspector General of Police confirmed the casualties and said the terrorists used around 6 kg of explosives.

¶5. (C) Though the attack was directed at security personnel, its location in the heart of Islamabad's upscale neighborhoods affected the capital's diplomatic (including this Embassy's) and political residents. Politicians of all parties, including National Assembly Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, Pakistan Muslim League-Q President Chaudhry Shujaat, and Jamaat Islami (JI) Chief Munnawar Hassan, all condemned the attacks and urged action against the terrorists.

ATTACK AT CHAKWAL

¶6. (C) A suicide bomber killed at least 26 people on April 5 outside a Shia complex or "imambargah" in the middle of Chakwal, a small Punjab city approximately 60 kilometers south of Islamabad. Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah told the press that security guards had intercepted the perpetrator before he could enter the mosque, where an estimated 1,200 worshippers had gathered. Police sources told the Embassy April 6 that they suspected Lashkar-e-Jhangvi involvement, which would link the Chakwal bomber with the attacks on the Sri Lankan cricket team and Manawan police training center, both in Lahore.

¶7. (C) Maharaja Tareen, a former Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Chakwal, told FSNOFF in an April 6 telcon that Shias hold a majority in Chakwal district. Despite absence of past sectarian conflict, Tareen pointed out, the authorities treat the district as sensitive and deploy the army during the Shia month of Muharram. She worried that the large population of Shias in Tala Gang "tehsil", or county, would make that neighboring area the next target of the terrorists. She also suspected that Chakwal's close vicinity to the frontier -- separated only by the district of Attock -- makes Chakwal vulnerable to terrorist elements from the tribal region.

¶8. (C) Chakwal District Nazim Sardar Ghulam Abbas reiterated in an April 6 telcon with PolOff that the district has experienced little sectarian strife in the past. However, he claimed, "security agencies" have noticed that many terrorist operatives have stayed in Chakwal with relatives or acquaintances before and after they conducted attacks, regardless of the location of the attack in Pakistan. He criticized the government for its lack of attention and understanding of the terrorist threat.

OTHER ATTACKS

¶9. (C) With large urban centers such as Lahore and Islamabad suffering from high-profile attacks, smaller attacks continue on almost a daily basis in the FATA and NWFP. On March 30, the same day as the attack on the police training center in Lahore, seven people, including five soldiers, were killed and nine injured when a suicide bomber drove his car into a military convoy on the Bannu-Miranshah road. On April 1, five policemen were killed and two critically injured in an ambush by militants in Upper Dir district. Additionally, on the same day as the Islamabad attack, a suicide attacker targeted a military convoy in Miranshah, North Waziristan resulting in more than 30 deaths. The Taliban are still careful that most of their attacks in Pakistan target police or security forces, except for the Chakwal incident that was aimed at Shias.

GOP RESPONSE

¶10. (SBU) In response to the spate of attacks, Prime Minister Gilani called a special meeting on April 7 and a cabinet meeting on April 8 to review the security situation. The initial meeting included leading federal ministers, chief ministers of all provinces, top police officials, heads of the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Participants decided that the parliamentary committee on national security would assess threats and

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prepare a draft national policy to deal with the state of insurgency, devise a de-radicalization program, enhance the capacity of law-enforcement agencies, and submit a report in two weeks.

¶11. (C) National Crisis Management Cell (NCMC) Director Tariq Lodhi told Poloff that the meeting was largely pro-forma and did not necessarily reflect a shift in policy. Lodhi, who took part in the Prime Minister's initial meeting, said the major weakness of the plan was that no ministry or body was put in charge of coordinating the efforts. Additionally, Lodhi felt that even if the heads of agencies had the requisite expertise, their staffs had neither the training nor the authority to develop effective counter-terrorism policy.

¶12. (C) Comment: The increase in attacks may appear to be the watershed that shifts Pakistani popular opinion in favor of fighting the Taliban. In fact when faced with videos of Taliban flogging a girl in Swat, Pakistanis responded with widespread protests. In reality, while most Pakistanis do not like the Taliban, many blame the GOP's cooperation with the USG for the increase in terrorism. Prior to this recent escalation of attacks in the settled areas, Mehsud had focused on the tribal areas and had signed a peace deal with the Pakistani military in February 2008. The common understanding was that as Mehsud proclaimed in February 2009, the Pakistani Taliban were to focus on Afghanistan and ISAF forces at the behest of Mullah Omar. Press reports of U.S. drone attacks in recent months targeting Mehsud and the USG bounty against him may have pushed the Taliban fight back to Pakistani security targets. The Taliban's renewed focus on the Pakistani heartland may also be because Swat has emboldened them; the government has virtually ceded Swat to

the Pakistani Taliban. Just as in Swat, when the GOP could no longer promise citizens law and order the Taliban is ready to step in.

¶13. (C) The Pakistani Taliban's attacks seek to undermine people's sense of security and trust in the GOP. Mehsud's increased attacks in urban centers have overwhelmed Pakistani security forces and the government's ability to provide law and order. Mehsud's TTP gains from the GOP's ineffectual security capacity, and is able easily to spread its loose network of terrorists across the country. At the same time the TTP is careful to target police and security forces and Shia minorities to avoid the general wrath of the Pakistani populace. With increasing attacks, faith in the GOP's ability to face terrorism is waning. The government's response thus far has been to call for a new integrated security policy, but no significant steps have been taken to stop the attacks. End comment.
PATTERSON